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THE INTERCHURCH WORLD MOVEMENT

DOES IT MEAN WHAT WE MEAN?

A SERMON
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THERE are times when the immediate urgency of our needs makes our choices very simple and easy. We need a doctor and thank no one at that time to delay us with the relative merits of the schools. Our world then knows two classes only: those who are doctors and those who are not. Or when we are floating in mid-ocean, we do not care about the color of the boat that comes, the flag it carries or the language spoken. A boat and men to save; these are enough and all.

When the stress is sufficient we become conscious suddenly that we are one with many we had forgotten we are with in anything; thought ourselves against them in everything. In a nation's extremity and in the presence of a common danger, the sense of wider kinship, always before present, becomes at once a near and conscious relation. Our oneness seems then quantitatively as the great range, and our differences but as the separate peaks. The choice then is not which one of many, but which one of two. The qualifying adjectives are dropped. We do not ask, "What kind of American?" but this only, "American or not?"

Our church world is back to one of these simple choices. Our fathers took the church for granted. Their only concern was, "What kind of church?" Our world is simpler than that; it is church or no church. We know an active anti-church party with

a program. As when the country was threatened, all Americans came to feel very near and companionable, so all church people of every name are now thrown together by the events and issues of our times. We may think the country a very poor thing and corrupt; say it is not worth standing up for or perpetuating. We do talk this way. But when it becomes a matter of having a country as it is, or no country, then we have to decide whether we mean what we say. So we have to say today whether the church is the useless thing, and worse, that we have said it is. There are those who go this far and one may make this decision and still be in a company. The choice today is between the church idea as a whole, the values it stands for and the kind of life it has held up, between this and no church. What we have said about it, is that just our loose and hypercritical way of talking, or is that the conviction of our hearts by which we are ready to stand? When it comes to a choice between the church as it is, as poor a thing as we may think it is, and no church at all, are we ready to back our judgment to the logical result, the complete elimination of the church from the world? The choice today is just that simple. It is between the whole church idea, without regard to kinds or divisions, and no church of any kind.

We have been going along with the same old forces about us that were about our fathers. Call them by whatever names we may: works of a personal devil, wiles of the flesh, impersonal forces of evil, misplaced or unredeemed good, the fact still remains that there are things present which unmake men and nations

now just as they have done always. There are forces of disorder, disintegration, dissolution and degeneration. We have ignorance, vice, selfishness, hate and criminality. These things are in our world as present facts and they do something to our world.

All at once, over night, the means of effecting solidarity came into our hands. Space was contracted; men were brought near together to share all knowledge and become one in their hitherto widely separated enterprises for every purpose. With all these helps it would seem that the old world might be lifted up at once into the better things too long delayed. This did not happen. Contracting space and talking around the world served equally the solidarity of the things we would banish and the things we would keep. The wires will carry across the country and under the waves a message for the devil's business at just the same speed as they will carry a message for a God, and at the same rate. The forces of evil saw the possibilities and saw them first. The things that unmake men, cities and nations, gained the first effective solidarity. The best forces of New York City have followed always as a slow second to the methods of Tammany Hall. The powers of evil made better use of the helps acquired; had a better organization and a larger fund at their back than the powers that make for righteousness. With the new possibilities of spreading everything came a new thought of man to spread: the brute man, the economic man, the stomach man, the fighting, industrial, selfish, material man. This was carried around the world.

At the very time this was happening, half the people were in institutions, variously named but bearing all one name, all opposed to these things which make for disintegration and disorder. Most of the other half were connected in some fashion. These millions of people believe in order, the moral law, in man not as a brute, a stomach or an economic piece of matter, but as a living soul, a spiritual entity. Yet with these institutions and these millions, the forces of evil grew apace and men came to speak of the ineffective and timid friends of God. The Lord's people are not equal; the Philistines are too much for the great hosts of Israel.

We found that these very things that millions of good men wish to keep: the forces that banish ignorance and give knowledge; that uphold the moral order, the sanctity of our homes, the decencies for ourselves and our children, found these lacking in effective solidarity. We found the institutions and those who give their lives to increase the very qualities which give us our being as a people, our whole distinction among the nations and our rating in the scale of human progress, found these institutions and their servants without resources, out at the knees, while the forces of evil had a full treasury. The things we wish to get rid of we found moving as a unit with an undivided front. They made their own the helps toward solidarity and effective propaganda; had a stored surplus with which to carry on.

The friends of God and the things we know we have to keep, moved out singly, as David with his little sling, but the miracle did not happen. Or they went

out in little bands as in Old Testament days when the great enemy host was conquered by the sudden intervention of the Lord, but again the miracle was not repeated. Now it has come home to us that the day of miracle is over. These things are put into our hands. Of themselves they have no moral color and express no preference for either side of the moral conflict. The side that uses them better; gets the more solidarity; has the better organization and the more effective propaganda, is the side that is going to win. If the forces of disorder, if brute and selfish men use the helps more effectively, then that kind of man will fill the world. If the friends of God and the moral order use the helps more effectively, then that kind of man will fill the world. By the very same helps by which vice can win, virtue must win. Miracles are over and the tools are in the hands of those who will take them to increase either the dark or the light.

Just what are the practical effects of some of the Christian doctrines on people, we do not know absolutely. Men differ about this. However this may be, no one doubts the worth to the present world of a vast organization of people of high purpose, operating methodically over a whole territory. If information is to be spread and men stirred to help any good thing, no one can doubt the worth of a vast organization that has the ear, the confidence, and can reach the hearts of the people in a short time. It took the war to reveal the divided impotency of the religious forces, especially the Protestant world. Made up, as all these churches are, of people who would do any

thing to their very limit to help any good cause, there was no way of reaching the Protestant world. There was no common center where information could be deposited with any assurance that it would reach the millions of the Protestant name. There was no spring to touch that would set in operation the vast machinery of the great Protestant organizations over the whole country. They were isolated companies, without unity of organization, command or common purpose. Men saw at once that here are the very conditions of failure even against an ordinary foe, let alone the great hosts of evil in the world.

As men thought this over they were impressed with the fact that it has been over four hundred years now since the world has had a chance to see the possibilities of a great church moving as a unit against the things that should not have dominion. They saw that with all the variety and freedom that have come with the Protestant principle, and this is a real gain, something has been lost in effectiveness against things which all, of all divisions, condemn. There are old conditions and old evils which all Protestant groups and all Catholics would like to help banish from the world. Irrespective of the name in the divided body, each is one with the whole body in this: it would like to help against the things by all condemned.

The possibilities of vice and ignorance, the possibilities of a theory of life and an estimation of human values, different from those held up by the church, have become suddenly evident and obvious. Men at once cast about for some means by which they might keep the precious Protestant heritage undimin-

ished and at the same time secure the great advantage of an undivided company against the things about which there is no division. Can the Protestant church be like the British Empire with unity in spirit and works for some purposes, of equal concern to all, while safeguarding at the same time the local freedom and autonomy of all the parts that make it up? The Interchurch World Movement is a vision of such empire. As all parts of the great Empire, with all their differences, came at once to the defense against the dangers which threatened the existence of the whole and each part alike, so, Protestantism would have all its parts respond for an offensive move against the evils which are of equal concern to all men in any church or in none.

It is a world movement. The world part is significant. A church may fix its eyes on the community or raise them; survey the world and have a world program. The facts are undisputed now that any condition of danger anywhere is an equal danger everywhere. Virtue is not safe at any point while vice is present at any point. All the world is endangered by ignorance, sickness, want or injustice in even the remotest parts. The diseases which sweep the world, men believe now, have their origin in pockets in the old world, and they show no preference; they leave no country unvisited. What is true of disease is true of everything else. Whatever we do to get ourselves in order, must be done everywhere.

What does the Protestant world propose to do? What appeal does it make to invite the confidence of men accustomed to real affairs, strict accountability,

minimum overhead and maximum results? We take six items from paid advertising space in a weekly of largest circulation. Presumably the gist of the thing would be stated here.

I. In the United States there are 5,500,000 people who cannot speak the English language. Mobilized Protestantism would teach them.

II. There are 450,000 students in schools depending upon church support. These schools are to be endowed.

III. Thousands of people are turned away from church hospitals because of lack of room. The combined forces of Protestantism would at once take away this reproach; take them in and minister unto them.

IV. The diseases that waste us come from the Orient. We are sick with them. We cannot be safe as long as China has one doctor for 400,000 people; cannot be safe while one-third of the babies in India die under two years of age. Prudence alone would send us there with healing. The humanity of the thing, the religion of the thing: "Unto the least of these," would send us speedily.

V. In the United States 12,000,000 children are entering into citizenship without moral or religious training. Unified Protestantism would teach them.

VI. Ministers' salaries are too low to invite men to the service of the church and to maintain them in efficiency. The whole institution is weakened by an impoverished ministry. All together they propose to remedy this.

Any one in the least familiar with Protestant thought through its four hundred years must be struck with this program. Here is something new. If the leaders of even a hundred years ago could come back, they would ask, "What has happened to the Protestant church?" We should note first that it is a world movement, but what world? It is a this world movement. Not a word about saving men from something or to something in another world. Six things are named, but saving the souls of the heathen from perdition is not mentioned. The old leaders of not very long ago would say that the great salvation, the lost soul and the redeeming blood to save it, have been forgotten. They would say, "You have forgotten the gospels and have all become Christians after the model of the book of James. You have all fallen to the Unitarian heresy of good works, trying to show your faith by your works. You have named six things that you are going to do, and five of them are about filling people's minds with knowledge; educating them, and curing them of disease. You do not mention the lost soul to be saved by faith in something to be believed." There is no answer to this. It is so. The heresy of good works, a long standing Protestant heresy, has become a Protestant world program. Are we not glad that these cardinal principles of our faith, which we believe to be religion pure and undefiled, have gained such wide and general acceptance? We should be glad for the thing itself, under whatever name and in whatever form it comes, if we are really more concerned about the Kingdom than our personal dis-

tion within it. Most of the things that men strive for do not come in just the way they planned for them to come. And we do not complain, "Though all that we had hoped for and darkly groped for, . . .
Come not in the form that we prayed that it should."

Here is the Protestant world much divided over some fine distinctions which most people do not understand very well. Hitherto they have seemed too important to compromise by association. The injunction to be a separate and peculiar people has been heeded strictly. We have insisted always that these differences do not matter so much: at least they are not of first importance. We have been of the opinion that the dangers of contamination from those of other interpretations have been much overrated; have been convinced for a long time that the forces of good are very much delayed by too many separate and peculiar peoples fearful of contaminating contacts.

We should be heartily glad that this way of looking at the matter has become general. It became clear that some unity of belief in some things and some unity of purpose in some kinds of work are absolutely essential if Protestantism is to do anything in non-Christian countries. It is now evident that such unity is just as essential at home if Protestantism is to help more than it confuses. There are some first magnitude beliefs that are held in common and there are some first magnitude tasks to do. There are things to banish which all condemn and things to establish which all would like to help establish.

Some of the world's needs are so immediate and urgent that we have no disposition, in the face of the common danger, to quibble with any group that can help do them and speedily. In our world men must be brought together who can be brought together. We might complain that the number who can agree is not greater and we might rejoice that it is so large. Some cannot come in because the movement is already too inclusive and some cannot come in because it is not inclusive enough. We understand the practical difficulties in bringing men together and we would not have any good delayed. Men of this great movement are equally ashamed of two groups alike: those too much concerned with their separateness to come in, and those of their own number who would shut out those committed to still wider liberty and the same good works. The shame itself is promising for it often worketh repentance.

We wish each group to keep its convictions in belief and practice, not because we agree with them or think this belief and practice the best. We understand that these distinctions are to be guarded; that the territory is to be apportioned so that each Protestant body is left free to do its work with the religious convictions that it thinks true and effective. We wish this liberty for small companies preserved in the world. We are not the least interested in a Pan-Protestant movement that can get enough power and money to standardize belief and drive men by the very pressure of its influence to a uniform Protestant type. That would be a deadly thing. The world had 1500 years of standardized belief with no

freedom for small companies that might like something else. Fifteen hundred years is quite enough and we wish no more of it. Protestantism with a billion dollars at its back and a world organization could be just as fatal in the end as Pan-Catholicism. This liberty for small companies is our most precious heritage. We have no interest in a Pan-Protestant world against a Pan-Catholic world, a Pan-Anglican or a Pan anything else. A combined Protestant program with common hatred or suspicion for its bond of union would be just as bad as any other combination with such a bond of union. A combined dislike or distrust of heathen, pagan, Catholic, Jew, Mohammedan or Mormon is not made better in the least by having Protestant written before it. Critics have suggested these things. The very mention of the possibility should give deep searching of heart that these imputed motives be found without foundation.

As we look over the long centuries of change it must seem to us now that every religion is richer for the heretical children to which it has given birth. The Jewish church is a better church for her own and for the world because of this persistent Christain heresy that went out. The Catholic church is a better church because she had to share the world with her two children of heresy, Protestantism and Anglicanism. And the whole Protestant church is better for the Unitarian heresy that arose to challenge her thought. Can we believe that Protestantism has reached its final form which can appeal, at last, to men of all habits of mind everywhere? Is it the

best form of thought with which to do practical work in our time? We doubt not that many who would be glad to help in the good works might hesitate to accept much that is believed. You know one; I know another and there must be thousands who cannot accept the cardinal doctrines of Protestantism as they are expressed today. Those, be they few or many, who have insisted on true things to believe and liberty to believe them, have done a great service. This has been the chief glory of the whole movement for four hundred years. For any group of truth seekers to cease now making its contribution in its own way would be a loss to all.

There are two things that matter and one matters just as much as the other. Each must be kept stretched up to all the truth of things that he can grasp, with a company for fellowship, congenial to his mind in thought and to his spirit in worship. That is one thing and that is religious liberty, the most dearly bought and hence the most precious possession of our civilization. Nothing would spell such disaster to the world as losing this or even minimizing it in the least. The progress of the whole race is served best by each believing what he thinks he must, unhindered, and saying it in his own way without fear and without reproach. What he believes may not be true or said in the best way, but it is of vital importance that he be left free to believe it and to say it. The long experience of men says that this is more important than the largest unity kept undivided at the price of mental integrity, or the strictest conformity kept unquestioned by mental reservations.

The other matter is of equal importance. There is much to be done to get our immediate world in order. Each must go out with these convictions of his heart, with his company large or small, to join hands with all who will receive him and his fellowship.